

Abdul Abulbul Amir

I had my introduction to Plebe Year before I ever set foot on the banks on the Severn. My father, CAPT Allan Douglas Blackledge, USNA Class of 1920, "encouraged" me to memorize and sing *Abdul Abulbul Amir* for years before my acceptance to USNA. I still have it stored in a few memory cells after lo these 60 years, and can belt it out when-ever Bonnie requests. (OK, that doesn't happen often). Written to commemorate the Russo-Turkish War of 1876, today it seems a most appropriate description of the *Clash of Civilizations* with the latest news from Syria and the Middle East. Wiki carries the lyrics, which are exactly as I recall:

The sons of the Prophet are brave men and bold
And quite unaccustomed to fear,
But the bravest by far in the ranks of the Shah,
Was Abdul Abulbul Amir.

If you wanted a man to encourage the [van](#),
Or harass the foe from the rear,
Storm fort or redoubt, you had only to shout
For Abdul Abulbul Amir.

Now the heroes were plenty and well known to fame
In the troops that were led by the Czar,
And the bravest of these was a man by the name
Of Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

One day this bold Russian, he shouldered his gun
And donned his most truculent sneer,
Downtown he did go where he trod on the toe
Of Abdul Abulbul Amir.

Young man, quoth Abdul, has life grown so dull
That you wish to end your career?
Vile infidel, know, you have trod on the toe
Of Abdul Abulbul Amir.

So take your last look at the sunshine and brook
And send your regrets to the Czar
For by this I imply, you are going to die,
Count Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

Then this bold [Mameluke](#) drew his trusty skibouk,
Singing, "Allah! Il Allah! Al-lah!"
And with murderous intent he ferociously went
For Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

They parried and thrust, they side-stepped and cussed,
Of blood they spilled a great part;

The [philologist](#) blokes, who seldom crack jokes,
Say that hash was first made on the spot.

They fought all that night neath the pale yellow moon;
The din, it was heard from afar,
And huge multitudes came, so great was the fame,
Of Abdul and Ivan Skavar.

As Abdul's long knife was extracting the life,
In fact he was shouting, "Huzzah!"
He felt himself struck by that wily [Calmuck](#),
Count Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

The Sultan drove by in his red-breasted [fly](#),
Expecting the victor to cheer,
But he only drew nigh to hear the last sigh,
Of Abdul Abulbul Amir.

There's a tomb rises up where the Blue [Danube](#) rolls,
And graved there in characters clear,
Is, "Stranger, when passing, oh pray for the soul
Of Abdul Abulbul Amir."

A splash in the [Black Sea](#) one dark moonless night
Caused ripples to spread wide and far,
It was made by a sack fitting close to the back,
Of Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

[slowly, with feeling:]

A Muscovite maiden her lone vigil keeps,
'Neath the light of the cold northern star,
And the name that she murmurs in vain as she weeps,
Is Ivan Skavinsky Skavar.

D.B.A. Moore, aka Navy Davy, that intrepid classmate of mine who is in large part responsible for the union of Blackie and Bonnie, adds the following:

Blackie - The Book of Navy Songs was copyrighted in 1926 and 1937 by Doubleday. The copyright was assigned to US Naval Institute in 1948. The book was revised in 1955 and that is the one we were issued. There were 94 songs in the book. Near the end of the book is "My Bonnie" (lies over the ocean.....). The same tune was used for The Marine Pilot's Hymn (expressing Marine pilots unhappiness with flying from CVEs) and The R.O.T.C. Song (...take down your service flag, Mother, Your son's in the ROTC)

Songs books at USNA are passé since some stupid ass Superintendant let the tradition of singing football fight songs discontinue. I don't see how they can justify having the enlisted band there anymore. Prof Gilley must be turning over in his grave.

- Navy Davy

Mike Shelley, aka NStar, our once and future Class Secretary, adds the following:

It has been many years since I heard the Brigade sing anything other than Navy Blue and Gold or Anchors Aweigh at football games. The fight songs were such a prominent part of our Midshipman years that I wager most of us can remember most of the lyrics even now.

How politically incorrect are the Abdul Abulbul Amir lyrics these days!

Reference:

<http://www.usna63.org/tradition/#songbook>

Wiki [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Abulbul_Amir] adds:

A great many versions of the lyrics exist, with the names of the principal characters spelled in a variety of ways. "Abdul Abulbul Amir" is the most common name for a music-hall song written in 1877 (during the Russo-Turkish War) under the title "Abdulla Bulbul Ameer" by Percy French, and subsequently altered and popularized by a variety of other writers and performers. It tells the story of two valiant heroes - the titular Abdulla, fighting for the Turks, and his foe (originally named Ivan Potschjinsky Skidar in French's version), a Russian warrior - who encounter one another, engage in verbal boasting, and are drawn into a duel in which both perish.

In the 1935 film *Shipmates Forever* Dick Powell's Crooner turned Midshipman character, Dick Melville is ordered by upper-classmen to sing "just the first 100 verses of Abdul...". Upon leaving the room, another upper-classman asks for help with verse 38.

In the 1949 film *Task Force*, Gary Cooper's naval aviation officer character "Jonathan Scott" sings a line from "Abdul...", telling Jane Wyatt's character "Mary Morgan" that all the Annapolis cadets in his day had to learn the song.

Here's a submittal from Dave (DBA) Moore that should evoke some memories about marching to class.

Tonight (8 August 2001) I was watching TV and an ad came on hawking a set of CD's by the Kingston Trio. The snippets of music played reminded me of one of my favorite memories of those few years.

Eight seasons we passed down the brick walkways toward Mahan Hall and the other academic building to cross a few more rivers. We would salute Tecumseh with a left hand and/or throw pennies (some mids allegedly threw their pennies at the young dependents scooping up the coins). But January 1961 was special. As we marched off from Tecumseh Court some clever individual started singing the chorus from the Kingston Trio song - "It takes a worried man to sing a worried song (3 times), I'm worried now but I won't be worried long". And before long everyone formed up in front of Mother B was singing along.

That memory is so clear to me I can almost hear George Nolan's voice.

A few days later, marching to class ended forever at USNA - and the singing spirit at the Naval Academy started to die. We were lucky !

And a response from Mike Shelley:

Looking back across a 40-year gulf it's easy for me to say this, but: I miss the marching. There was an inherent spirit to it that defies description. You know what I mean. What I miss the most, though, is marching up chapel walk on Sunday mornings with the Chiefs' band playing up-tempo hymns and all of us groggy Mids held very erect by our full-dress or white service uniforms. I feel better each time I remember that scene.

Today's mids never sing.

Our long-suffering USNA63.org webmaster Steve Coester captured many of these memories from the Class of 1963. Here's a cause for nightmares from Mike Moore.

I remember the potentially most disastrous thing I did Plebe year: When Billy Graham preached at the Chapel, I attended in one of the church parties. As we marched smartly up the entrance to the Chapel, and whipped our overcoats off smartly, I realized I had no blouse on! (We were in Service Dress Blues B w/overcoats) After groping frantically and unsuccessfully at the inner liner of my overcoat, I realized I could not sit in the chapel in shirt sleeves. I did a "to the rear march" and went between the 1st and 2nd squads all the way through the formation. I came out the rear just as a church party from town was returning nearby. I quickly fell in, marched back to Mother B, and was dismissed. I returned to my room, not believing what had happened. I decided I was going to be guilty of false muster unless I did something, so I went to my Company Commander's room and turned myself in, so to speak. He had me repeat my story a couple of times, and then he got his classmates in the room, and I repeated it several more times. Fortunate for me, they thought it was all pretty amusing, and I suffered no immediate consequences. I've often wondered what would have happened had I sat in the Chapel in shirtsleeves! I have had nightmares about this by the way.

Here's a Dec 2004 submittal from Dirck Praeger concerning LCDR "Black Jack" Scoville.

I was looking over the class website and re-read some of the Midshipman Memories that I had checked out several years back. After reading Dave Moore's and Mike Shelly's memories of marching to class, I was reminded of the infamous LCdr "Black Jack" Scoville...the Company Officer who was the terror of Bancroft Hall and especially of formations marching to class. My favorite Black Jack/marching to class story is the one where the section leader (I can't remember who it was) had lost his right gray leather glove and had pulled a black sock over his hand to replace it. Black Jack halted the formation and ordered the section leader to prepare for inspection. The section leader executed open ranks, then reported to Black Jack that the formation was prepared for inspection, saluting him with the black sock. Black Jack then proceeded to fry the section leader for unshined shoes. He had to have noticed the sock. Black Jack left USNA after our youngster or second class years and was happily gone, if not forgotten.

Fast forward a few years to the Second Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, NC. A number of Class of '63 2nd Lieutenants were assigned to the various Regiments of the Division. Besides myself there was Joe Morra, Harry Johnston, Clay Dugas and a few others. A number of Class of '61 and '62 lieutenants were also there. Back then we did a lot of amphibious training off the beaches of Camp Lejeune by boarding and spending several days aboard the various amphibious ships from Norfolk and Little Creek, then we would conduct landings and march back to the barracks.

One time we boarded an old LST for some training, and the captain was none other than Black Jack Scoville. Beside myself there were several other USNA lieutenants aboard, and we were all petrified of Black Jack. We were ready to hide in the tank deck to avoid him, but it turned out that his crew loved him. We hesitantly introduced ourselves to Black Jack as graduates who knew him from Academy days, and he was glad to have us aboard. We exchanged some sea stories and were very comfortable with him when we left his ship and landed.

So what's the point of all this? Black Jack Scoville's time as a Company Officer at the Naval Academy must have been an act! He was a completely different person in the fleet. Wonders never cease.

Here's an addendum from Norm Shackelton:

Several of us remember the good side of Black Jack Scoville earlier than his command tour. I don't remember all in the group but Kevin Sullivan was one. For Youngster Cruise (summer of 60) we were assigned to the *USS Fiske*, a DDR that was in dry dock in Boston when we arrived. Black Jack Scoville was our OIC for the cruise. We started off by flying by UF Albatross somewhere - I don't remember anymore - from the Severn River. We got underway from Boston and went to Newport. LCDR Scoville started off by setting up a trip to the Boh Brewery in Fall River, MA, a beach party complete with girls at one of the Newport beaches and several other parties in which he participated with that big smile and cocked cap of his always visible. When we were at sea he always was on one of the bridge wings just smiling. He was a terrific guy on that cruise - everyone liked him. We also went to Norfolk and Bermuda on that cruise.

When we were returning by bus to USNA, we took a swing by to sight the Chapel Dome to officially complete youngster cruise. Then LCDR Scoville spoke to us from the front of the bus. He said, "We've had a great youngster cruise (cheers) but I want you to remember something - Once we're back inside that gate I'm Black Jack Scoville again - (loud cheers)." We got a good look at the USNA and fleet versions of Black Jack Scoville.

And I actually received the following from Jack Scoville!

I certainly enjoyed the reminiscences of bygone days at Canoe U, as we used to call it when I was a mid a century or so ago. Thanks very much for alerting me to your class's fine web site. The incidents cited therein may well have happened, but the details were a wee bit embellished.

I had a lot of fun playing games as the 14th Company Officer (1958-61). It may have been before your class got there, that a youngster got real cute and put a turtle in my desk drawer. When I arrived that morning, I heard rustling noises and smelled something. The turtle had made his mark by crapping. I laughed a little when I saw the mess and thought it was a cleanup job for someone. But, when I looked in my in-basket, I found a cute note from "Midn Anonymous 3c" and decided I'd try to find the culprit by matching up the typewritten note with a typewriter in a 3c room. About ten rooms into my search, the match was made. When the 3c reported to the note I'd left for the man in charge of room, I simply asked "Are you the guilty one? The midn smartly answered "Yes, sir!!!" Naturally, in BJ style, I wrote him up. The following morning, while the Batt Officer was reviewing the fraps, he laughed and said, Well, Jack, you've made the LOG again." and cancelled the Form 2.

Another meanness by BJ was the note I found sticking out of a 2c lockbox. I pulled it out and read a note from the BOOW telling the 2c that he'd left the box open and suggesting he get

rid of his cheese and crackers, etc. So, it was a two-fer, the BOOW for IPD and the 2c for unauthorized stuff.

Enough for now, thanks for your alertness and call.

- Just plain Jack

These Jack Scoville stories have rekindled some memories from Jim Ring. He's not sure who the OOD was but it's a good story

After the Farewell Ball at the end of Youngster year, Nick Daramus and I were sitting with our drags in their car. We were in the parking lot by the Midshipman store. It was totally dark out with no one else around (or so I thought). I was in the front seat with my drag and Nick was in the back seat with his drag. I had just gotten pinned to my drag that was probably sealed with a kiss and that was all, since I was totally naïve about women (still am). Suddenly there was a knock on my side of my door and OOD said "You and your mate get out of the car". I thought he meant my drag, so incredulously I asked, "Do you want my drag out of the car also." He said "No the mid in the back seat." We got out and he fined us for Public Display of Affection, which carried 30 demerits and 10 hours of extra duty, both of which would roll to second class year. Then he sent us back to our rooms about 20 minutes before liberty was up.

Nick somehow talked his way out the Form 2, but I was never a BSer like Nick, so when I came back at the end of the summer, I was facing 10 hours marching with my M1 and starting Second Class year with 30 demerits. Then something happened that showed God was looking out for me. The Maharishi of somewhere was a guest of the Brigade in the mess hall and he declared amnesty for all. My 10 hours of extra duty were wiped out. I am not sure about the demerits. It was the only time in four years, that I remember someone declaring amnesty.

As a footnote to my "Public display of affection" charge, a few years ago, I saw a Plebe walking down a crowded street in Annapolis with his drag. He had his cap cocked back, he was walking on the inside of the sidewalk, and they were holding hands. Guess the definition of Public Display of Affection changed.

This may never end. Most of these guys are of an age that they can't remember what they had for dinner last night, but the old Yard memories are clear as a bell. Here's another Dirck Praegerism:

Now you've got me going. I should have kept my mouth shut about Black Jack. The scene: Tecumseh Court on the night of our Ring Dance.

As a member of the Ring Dance Committee I was granted an extra half-hour of liberty, thus my arrival in Tecumseh Court was at an odd time. Instead of being part of the rush to get back into Bancroft Hall at the normal expiration of liberty, I was all alone in the middle of Tecumseh Court, and found myself in a very compromising position.

Backtrack a couple of hours. After leaving the Ring Dance a significant number of the 6th Company and our drags headed for the cottages at Mayo Beach. In violation of USNA Regs, we lifted a few glasses to celebrate our new class rings. Everybody else left to get back

before liberty expired. Not me, having an extra half-hour. My drag and I lifted a few more glasses, etc.

Sometime during the rush to get back to Bancroft Hall, I lost my cover [hat]. Thus, I found myself in the middle of Tecumseh Court without a cover, with one shoulder board hanging loose, and with an obvious starboard list from lifting too many glasses. There was only one open entrance to the Rotunda at that hour. The side door on the Second Regiment side was open, and silhouetted in the light coming out from the Rotunda was the OOD and his mate. It was one of the Marines in the Executive Department. I figured I was screwed. I envisioned myself spending the first half of First Class year on restriction. I could imagine the OOD licking his chops and thinking, "Ah ha! A drunk Mid without his cover returning late from liberty." As Black Jack would have said, this was a three-fer; drinking, out of uniform, and late. We stood motionless and stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity, and then...AND THEN, the Marine turned on his heel and disappeared into Bancroft Hall, along with his mate. I couldn't believe my eyes! I ran up to the door, stuck my head in and looked around. The OOD was nowhere in sight! I hustled up the ladder to the 4th deck as fast as I could and disappeared into my room and gave thanks to the Creator.

In four years that was the only time I was ever caught in violation of Regs that I didn't get fried. To this day I don't know who that Marine was. But bless him for giving me some slack during June Week. His action only solidified my determination to become a Marine upon graduation the next year. And so I did, and as they say, the rest is history.

QUALITY - '63